Factual Statements to Supplement Comments of Michael Dakers, Legal Member of the Royal Town Planning Institute, on the Publication Draft of the Core Strategy for the Medway Local Development Framework (Published August 2011)

(a) On behalf of Strood Town Centre Forum (as Chairman)

(b) On behalf of Michael Gill Limited Owners of a Substantial Property in the Centre of Strood Comprising Offices and 5 Retail Shops.

(c) On behalf of the Firm of Dakers Marriott, Private and Commercial Solicitors, Practising in the Centre of Strood

1. Qualifications and Sources of Michael John Dakers, L.M.R.P.T.I

1.1 I am a Solicitor and Planning Consultant. From 1945, I have, basically, lived in Rochester/Strood and their adjacent localities.

1.2 I am the majority shareholder/Director of Michael Gill Ltd who developed/built Michael Gill Building, Tolgate Lane, Strood, ME2 4TG (completed November 2010).

1.3 I am the fourth generation member of my family to live and work in the Medway Towns, particularly around Strood and Rochester. I have a special expertise in Town and Country planning acquired since I commenced employment in July 1962 from 125 High Street, Strood (offices of Basset & Boucher) of which firm I subsequently became a partner (1969) trading from the same address. I was away from the Medway Towns for three years only (1966-1968).

1.4 I have been a member of the Strood Town Centre Forum since it was formed in the early 2000's and became Chairman in September 2011. I have of course traded and been well acquainted with the trading locality of Strood as set out before.

1.5 I was admitted as a solicitor in July 1967 and took the special university course to become a Legal Member Royal Town Planning Institute on the 9th July 1975. In the initial stages of my practice in the law, I was involved in early planning enquiries and appeals since 1962, as my father was instructed by substantial company clients and Gillingham Borough Council. I am also recognised by the Law Society as a specialist town and country planning practitioner.

1.6 Over the years I have appeared in and given evidence as an expert planning witness at several planning appeal enquiries and related tribunals within the South East (particularly in Medway and surrounding districts).

1.7 What is contained in this document and the representations has been personally observed and is from my personal knowledge.

2. Town Centres – Retail/Employment/Infrastructure - History

2.1 In 1970 the first of the Medway Towns Town Plans was formulated. At the time it dealt mainly with earmarking specific areas and road infrastructure around the Medway Area. It earmarked land for a Strood ring road. This ring road I have marked on a copy of the central Strood inset plan for the Medway Local Plan (Adopted Version) 2003 ("2003 Plan")(Appendix 1). This same Strood ring road had been identified in the 1970 plan and is clarified as the third item in "New Roads" on page 72 of the Medway Towns Local Plan 1992 ("1992 Plan").

2.2 The 1992 Plan sections relating to "5. Retail" and "6.Transportation" are set out at Appendix 2. Set out in Appendix 3 is the Medway Towns Local Plan Area Existing Highway Network Plan from the 1992 Plan.

2.3 The new roads proposed in the 1992 Plan included a Medway Town Northern Relief Road in three sections as set out on pages 73 to 74 and had been the same as the 1970 plan. This is now the Medway Towns Northern Link Road running from the M2 motorway junction through to junction 4 on the M2 motorway. The proposals contained at section (a) Chatham ring road) (b) A231 Gillingham Centre Relief Road) (d) The Medway Town southern peripheral road) (e) the A228 Frindsbury Road) (h) the M2 widening) and (i) the A229 improvements to Bridgewood roundabout) have all been carried out.

2.4 The six roads schemes referred to briefly at the bottom of page 74 appear to have been largely carried out leaving only the Rainham Southern Relief Road (g) and the A2 Strood ring road (c) unfulfilled from twenty years ago.

2.5 The Chatham ring road had been presaged by the dualling of the A2 New Road which had been largely completed with phases 3a and 3b to be finished as indicated by the 1992 Plan. That was carried out shortly after 1992. However, there was considerable public furore (including a letter that I have referred to in my representations) when the Council (in 2007) decided to replace it with a two way system. This is referred to in the representations and the appendices (specifically my letter to the local paper) following public meetings at which the same views were expressed.

2.6 So far as the Strood Town Centre ring road scheme is concerned it will be seen from paragraph 8.5.70 of the 2003 Plan that this was abandoned by the Council, who were then the Highway Authority in 1997. That was the year that Medway

Council was formed incorporating Rochester upon Medway City Council and Gillingham Borough Council. The policy refers to details of the Council proposed replacement scheme being given below but the only scheme that had any relevance to the Strood Town Centre were environmental improvements. This did nothing to improve the road problem that has existed for many years. It is difficult to see what has been done under that proposal (paragraph 8.5.80).

2.7 I have been very much involved in representation and attendance at meetings concerning Strood's proposed road schemes. There had been several up to 1997 which included the possibility of dualling Commercial Road to bypass the High Street area, but got no further because it was perceived as cutting off the High Street from the area to the South (now a Retail Park). All routes led back to the ring road scheme where the route on the North side lay inside the railway line (Rochester to Victoria) and appeared universally accepted for which land was retained, some of it acquired by the Council through compulsory acquisition or blight notice activities. The route to the South was always considered difficult and was the subject of most discussion. Although identified in respective plans since 1970 it has never really been worked up as a full proposal.

2.8 Since 1997 there has been one public consultation that took place in relation to this problem when nothing concrete arose. I had put forward, at a working party, a proposal which involved utilising the northern part of the ring road and a southern road immediately bypassing the Centre running through the Civic Centre car park (as it then was) and might have required the removal of the buildings incorporating the Civic Centre car park access before linking up back with Commercial Road, Strood thus incorporating the B&Q Retail Park into the Town Centre. It could also link up with proposals that were around for a road from the Southern end of Rochester Bridge (perhaps off a roundabout there) with a link to the spur at Saxon Way so that immediate access to the M2 motorway could be given at junction 2. Unfortunately this suggestion was summarily rejected by the officers conducting the working party. No other proposals seemed to be submitted.

3. Retail/Employment – Strood

3.1 It is clear from the narrative of the 1992 Plan that:

"Strood Centre although possessing certain advantages such as two large convenience stores and several large surface level car parks, suffers from the division of the Centre by major through roads. Even if this problem were to be overcome, the quality of the environment in the Centre is still poor in comparison with other similar Centres." Paragraph 5.34.

3.2 Paragraph 6.26 of the 1992 Plan refers to:

"Congestion is severe in Central Strood where the A228 and A2 cross by means of a gyratory system using the main shopping streets. The ring road is proposed to reduce delays and relieve the disruptive effect of traffic on the Town Centre".

3.3 The Medway Towns Northern Relief Road which is also referred to at paragraph 6.26 (c) has been constructed and in use for several years, but has not significantly reduced the traffic flows. The priority of the Strood ring road appears to have been lost in whatever reassessments took place and Strood Town Centre is still severly adversely affected.

3.4 With reference to abandoned schemes in paragraph 2.3 above, apart from the pedestrian crossing enabling passage from the B&Q retail park to the main High Street area (which I understand is now to be converted into an improved crossing as a result of an application that was approved on Wednesday 9th May 2012 for a new Tesco store on its present site, there are no road improvements that have been made to the Strood Town Centre over the years.

3.5 Car Parks
The car park at Friary Place lying to the North of the High Street has been bought by Aldi Stores who got approval for a store and submitted a new application containing few variations except a link road from North Street to Station Road which is recommended for approval for the 30th May 2012. I understand that the store is intended to be in place by October/November 2012. Therefore a very large public car park is lost.

3.6 Similarly the car park which a lot of the public use at B&Q Retail Park is not under the control of the Council. The Temple Street car park will be incorporated into the new Tesco store which is approved on 9th May so that is lost too. The only public car park which is left is the Commercial Road car park. The former Civic Centre car park is only temporary.

3.7 Retail Offer
Reference is made in paragraph 5.34 of the 1992 Plan to two large convenience stores. They were Safeway and the present Tesco. Tesco continues in its then form but Safeway has now been split into two and is currently occupied by Wilkinsons and an Asda Express. Safeway were taken over by Morrisons approximately ten years ago, which coincided with their having been given permission for an edge of town centre store which now exists immediately South of the B&Q retail park. That will mean that there will be a Morrisons, a Tesco (both of large size), an Aldi and an Asda and a Wilkinsons within the general area known as Strood Town Centre, albeit that Morrisons and Tesco are outside the core retail centre.

3.8 Whilst all this has been going on the individual and High Street shops have been under considerable pressure to survive. We have in fact lost Woolworths (replaced by Icelands) a former Kwiksave subsequently Halfords/Motor World

which is currently vacant. There are several shops that are empty, although the amount of vacant space is probably less than the national average. The problem of roads in Strood Town Centre has, however, never been tackled over a period of more than forty years properly whilst it appears that every other road scheme that was promulgated in the 1992 Plan has effectively been carried out.

3.9 My comments on the Strood Masterplan are repeated in full at Appendix 4 although extracts have been included in my representations. Although the comments were acknowledged by the Council, I am not aware as to how much consideration was given to them or what their responses or thoughts might have been on them. The Masterplan forms part of the evidence documents for the inquiry (Index EB137).

3.10 All of this clearly shows that the road problem was identified very long ago, but has never been resolved and at best has been tinkered around the edges. It is urgently necessary, for the continuance of Strood Centre as an important town centre within the Medway Towns and the only one on the West bank of the River Medway to give priority to a new Strood road scheme which should be given top priority in pursuance of my representations.

3.11 See Appendix 1 where I have marked the physical features referred to.

4. Retail and Employment – Chatham

4.1 As indicated above the Chatham ring road scheme was implemented around the time of the 1992 Plan. Having been constructed it was reasonably successful as a means of enabling people to get to the Town Centre shops by road and to park in the central car parks (largely the Pentagon) and by bus because the bus station was situate on the first floor of the Pentagon Centre. At the time Chatham had a major department store in that Alders relocated from a site on the High Street (where Argos is now situated) to where the present Debenhams lies. There was a Woolworths, Marks and Spencer and a large Co-operative department store. It attracted a lot of people and they could easily get there. By using the ring road drivers could avoid easily the Town Centre if they wished. For example those from the Maidstone and Rochester areas could get through to Brompton and St. Mary's island/Dockyard via Glebe Lane without having the circuitous and congested route round the Brook.

4.2 Several factors contributed to the decline of Chatham: -

a) the loss of Marks and Spencer, the Co-operative and Woolworths;

b) the removal of the Ring Road and its replacement by a congestion causing two way system.

c) the removal of any route on the Eastern side of the Town Centre bypassing the Centre to link up with Dock Road.

d) the pulling down of the Sir John Hawkins flyover so that pedestrians have to cross the Bus Station access road in order to move from the Sun Pier side of the High Street into the main part.

e) the removal of the bus station from the central area and its placement at Glebe Lane.

4.3 As a result very few of the locals want to shop in Chatham and make determined efforts to shop elsewhere, such as Hempstead Valley, the Outlook Centre, or even Strood (if they could struggle with the traffic). Chatham is generally regarded amongst the local populace as a lost cause. It is not therefore going to be helpful to regenerate Chatham as a town centre by other external improvements that do not get to the core of the problem which is that it lacks a heart. It therefore needs a central town square of sufficient size as indicated on the plan at Appendix 5 (adapted from the 1992 Plan) where I have marked the Ring Road.

4.4 The situation at Chatham (and Strood) was adversely affected by the decision of the Council in late 2010 to approve a substantial convenience store on the application of Sainsbury's at Plot 1 Anthony's Way, immediately on the West side of Medway Tunnel. Despite the Planning Officers clear refusal recommendations and the observations of a number of local people against it (particularly from Strood) the Councillors approved it (subject to being called in by the Government, which regrettably did not happen) due to its support from the Hoo Peninsular area. That was despite the clear indications for a proposed substantial convenience store on the new Lodge Hill development, which would serve the Hoo Peninsular and knowledge of the now Tesco store being applied for.

5. Other Infrastructure

5.1 Hotels

Appendix 6 contains the 1992 policies in respect of Tourism. At 9.11 there is a reference to 700 bed spaces but not where they lie. Tourism centres on Rochester as having the major attractions of historical nature (Castle, Cathedral, Charles Dickens, Roman City etc). In the 2003 plan, Policy ED13 refers.

5.2 Apart from the Holiday Inn and the Bridgewood Manor there are no other four star hotels in the area and they are situated much further than walking distance from either Rochester or Chatham. A Ramada Express has been set up on the Eastern Medway Tunnel approach and a Premier Travel Inn at Gillingham. The former three star hotel (Bull) in Rochester High Street has effectively closed down and there is extremely limited hotel accommodation in Rochester High

Street. The Rochester Riverside area has not had any hotel accommodation provided yet, nor is it certain where it would go. The paucity of accommodation for an area which has such rich history and heritage, and could easily merit up to a weeks stay, is inappropriate and insufficient.

5.3 River Transport

Although there have been proposals to use the River for transport, they have not been effectively incorporated. A proposal for a river bus did not get off the ground. The River is the last underused public highway in the Medway Towns and has not been the subject of any detailed and effective scrutiny to utilise it for tourist passenger/commuter use or to provide appropriate car parks to supplement its use.